

## Menacing Stratagem

*With Trump's impending assumption of power, India is further bent upon "credibly deterring" China.*

On 26 December 2016, India tested Agni-v, its intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) that has been claimed to be independently developed by the country's Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), and is said to be capable of delivering nuclear weapons. Thereafter, in the first week of January 2017, it was the turn of Agni-iv, another version with a shorter range, to be tried out. Agni-v's exact range is, according to the DRDO chief, "classified" information, but the same source went on to state that its range is between 5,500 and 5,800 kilometres. This was followed by a retired Indian army brigadier, now a self-styled defence analyst, bragging that India can now threaten major Chinese targets, "such as large cities." Predictably, India's big media went to town about this, but failed to point out that India developing ICBMs capable of delivering nuclear weapons is in violation of UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1172 (1998).

This UNSC resolution, among other things, called upon India and Pakistan "immediately to stop their nuclear weapon development programmes, to refrain from weaponisation or from the deployment of nuclear weapons, to cease development of ballistic missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons and any further production of fissile material for nuclear weapons ..." The resolution was passed unanimously on 6 June 1998 in the aftermath of the nuclear tests conducted first by India and then by Pakistan in May 1998. Much water has flowed down the Sutlej River since then, but India has still not been willing to address one of the root causes of the tensions between Islamabad and New Delhi, namely, the question of Kashmir.

Of course, what the UNSC considers one of the "essential foundations for the pursuit of nuclear disarmament," the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (widely referred to as the NPT), has been violated most of all, and with impunity, by the United States (US) in not fulfilling its commitments relating to nuclear disarmament under that treaty's Article VI. Moreover, the US is largely responsible for clearing the way for Israel to develop nuclear weapons and thereby endanger West Asian security, in general, and Iran's safety, in particular.

In 2008, with the signing of the Indo-US civilian nuclear deal, Washington granted India de facto recognition as a nuclear-weapons state. In effect, this means unilaterally throwing out of the window the NPT, which has been for decades the core of the international nuclear regulatory framework that Washington

itself had been largely responsible for putting in place. As is evident to anyone unwilling to suspend reason, with India able to import civilian nuclear technology, hardware and fuel from the US—what with the International Atomic Energy Agency and the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), under US pressures, removing the hurdles on such trade with India—New Delhi is now better able to focus the resource base of its nuclear programme on the development of its nuclear arsenal.

As if that was not enough, in mid-2016, Washington heavily backed India's application for membership in the 48-member NSG, knowing full well that complete and effective implementation of the NPT was the basis of NSG membership, and India was not even an NPT signatory. Yet Washington pushed for an exception to be made for India. This did not find favour with a number of NSG members—Austria, Brazil, China, Ireland, New Zealand, Switzerland and Turkey among them. Like the present tirade against China in Indian big media, when Beijing reminded India of the UNSC resolution, the media here went on a China-bashing campaign, accusing Beijing of blocking India's NSG membership. In fact, China was only asking for the NSG to stick to its membership rules; it was Washington that had been insisting on India's NSG membership outside the framework of the NPT.

The reasons for this are clear now. New Delhi is Washington's global-strategic Major Defence Partner with access to the US's advanced weaponry. It is in close collaboration, bilaterally and trilaterally, with Washington's main regional allies, Australia and Japan. It mouths the same lingo as Washington on the disputes in the South China Sea. US fighter aircraft and warships can now use Indian military bases to refuel and avail of their necessary supplies. And, as the new army chief General Bipin Rawat boasts, with the ICBMs capable of delivering nuclear warheads soon to be in place, and a new 17 Mountain Strike Corps with "quick reaction ground offensive capabilities" in the making, the Indian army has transformed its posture against China from "dissuasion" to "deterrence," and onwards to "credible deterrence." With Donald Trump in the Oval Office on 20 January, and given the fact that he has declared that he will not be bound by the "One China policy" that has hitherto recognised Beijing's sovereignty over all of China, including Taiwan, New Delhi seems to have been further emboldened to equating Washington's strategic objectives in Asia, and especially East and Southeast Asia, with its own.